DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 156 950 CG 012 540

AUTHOR Liskov, Adele H.
TITLE The Valuation of Housework: A Problem of Conceptualization and Measurement.
PUB DATE Sep 77
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Asscciation (72nd, Chicago, Illinois, September 5-9, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Economics; Family Management; *Financial Support; *Home Management; *Housewives; Multiple Employment; Productivity; Service Workers; Sex Discrimination; State of the Art Reviews; *Wages; *Working Women

ABSTRACT

Since "work" shifted frcm the hcusehold to the factory, it was not surprising that economics ignored the household as workplace. As a result, housework has not been defined as work. The productive basis of domestic labor, while having been transformed during industrialism, is nevertheless socially and econcmically productive. Economic productivity or the household under advanced capitalism has remained hidden by the male definers cf productivity and worth. Attempts to measure the worth cf household labor are confined to time allocation analysis and the market cost approach. Despite the weaknesses of these methods, studies have revealed the substantial economic contribution of the household to the national economy. A domestic wage would, therefore, be justified by the economic and social value contributed by the household sector. Policy proposals for establishing a domestic wage include allowing an income deduction for household labor, or establishing a Household Trust Fund implemented in much the same fashicn as the Social Security fund. (Author)

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THE VALUATION OF HOUSEWORK: A PROBLEM OF CONCEPTUALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT*

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*This paper was presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Sociological Association, Chicago, September, 1977. Reprint in part or whole prohibited without consent from the author.

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THE VALUATION OF HOUSEWORK: A PROBLEM OF CONCEPTUALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT

Conceptualization

Domestic labor reinforces and preserves the sexual division of labor. As such, it is a new form of a fundamentally untransformed sexual and, therefore, natural economy. Domestic labor, as we shall show, is also the creation of capitalism. It is reproductive labor, necessary but essentially uncreative and characterized by unending repetition. In arriving at a definition of domestic labor, i.e., housework, we seek to determine whether or not domestic labor is productive or unproductive labor. There are two aspects to this question, first, whether in a natural economy women's work is productive, that is, whether it yields a product. This paper will address this first aspect. Secondly, in a capitalist economy, is women's work productive, that is, yield a surplus value? This second aspect requires a consideration of whether nonwage earners (housewives) actually produce capital in the form of profits, and necessitates separate analysis. For the present purpose, in deciding whether household labor is productive or not, we must keep in mind the creative or the mere maintaining nature of this work.

One of the difficulties with previous examinations of women within the capitalist productive framework is the failure to specify correctly their historical economic position. There is a failure to establish the link between nature's gifts which are free and women's labor as an adjunct of such a natural economy--also free, allowing mere subsistence when carried out within capitalist relations, but offering no remuneration when outside capitalist relations. Like natural resources, women's works are merely given.

The sexual division of labor has been ignored in Marxist analysis of women since the preeminence of Engels' contention that man's oppression over woman

in monogamy coincided with the first class antagonism, slavery. This did not prevent Engels from perceiving that women's oppression was nevertheless situated in precapitalist economic relations. The modern subjugation of women was a result of the development of productive forces giving rise to private property. The division of labor was originally natural for both sexes: men hunted and women gathered. As Guettel (1974) has pointed out, one of society's first important cultural adaptations was assigning to the woman tasks compatible with childbearing. Firestone (1970) calls this the biological division of labor. However, with the advent of capitalism, women became engaged also in capitalist relations, culturally, and to some extent economically. Thus, an analysis of women cannot be confined to one dimension.

Within the sphere of natural economy, women are productive. Within capitalist economy, women are neither productive nor unproductive. Capitalist relations do not apply to the natural economy. By extension, capitalist relations do not apply to their labor as housewives, inasmuch as the tasks involved are adjunctive of the natural economy.

The circulation of commodities is the activity from which money is derived. The first appearance of capital is money.[1] This means that land and, in particular, payment-in-kind do not come under the jurisdiction of capitalist relations. Women's labor at home is not exchanged as a commodity. Their work in the home is not sold, insofar as the exchange which prevails is more a barter-like exchange than one of money exchange, nevermind capital.

Productive labor in the economic sense is applicable only to capitalist economy. It may still be argued, I think, that wherein women's work intersects with commodity production, their work may indeed fall under capitalist relations. The most obvious case is their participation in waged labor, and this is not problematic, first because in this case women derive a money wage and second, this form of work is not housework even though the tasks involved may stem

from the domestic sphere. The difficult case is the production of products, i.e., the maintenance and creation of labor power, in the home. Are we justified in considering the child and/or reenergized worker as women's product and, if so, as a commodity? The actual work involved still presides within the natural economic sphere but the end result enters the realm of capitalist economy.

Within a natural economy, there is no need to pay for what is essentially a natural resource. There is no such thing as "value" in a natural economy. Attempts to quantify domestic labor are merely attempts to reach a price for such labor. Such a price should not be confused with the notion of value, however. Labor, in itself, has no value. As a service commodity, we pay for the service of labor not at any intrinsic worth for the service, but a price reached arbitrarily in the marketplace. But, labor power and its components do yield a "value," i.e., price, which is quantifiable. Nevertheless, the price of labor power is not equal to its value which is always an unknown. The price is equated with a particular commodity which the market either accepts or rejects as its worth. Domestic labor is non-market labor which we claim can be quantified within an acceptable framework without claiming to identify the price of the labor with an intrinsic value.

The difficulty confronted in the measurement of housework is the lack of constituent components which are quantifiable. No need for raw materials, the "manufacture" of household products is merely the transformation of consumption goods. Service tasks do not yield a product which can be broken down into component parts. Only variable labor, Marx's term for the cost of labor power (one's wage), goes into household production. Like service labor, household labor has no marketable product, but rather, produces products for immediate consumption. The only exception to this may be the child who can be considered a social product.

Labor's worth is contained both in necessary material components and in the necessary labor time expended on labor's produce. The work involved in the product of labor is labor power, a living component which is realized in its own consumption during the act of its performance. Labor can be distinguished from work if we define labor as a creative or productive form of activity and work as an uncreative form of drudgery. These terms comply with the term "housework" which combines drudgery and the household. As a term, labor connotes a positive form of activity. Since work performed by housewives in the natural economy is productive, we may then refer to this activity as labor, more precisely, domestic labor. Some of the actual labor involved is still the work of drudgery, and within the natural economy is considered a productive laboring activity.

There are three main categories constitutive of a definition of 20th century American household labor: servicing, consumption management, and childcare. A degree of task-oriented overlap within these three areas is unavoidable. For the purpose of defining and enumerating these tasks, a tripartite separation is heuristic.

Servicing. Servicing includes cooking, washing, cleaning, clothing maintenance (laundry, ironing, mending), servicing those who are well and tending those who are ill ("mothering"), and providing emotional and sexual sustenance. In sum, servicing transforms consumables into products for immediate consumption, or to use Marx's term, use-values. Servicing is maintenance activity, the work which reproduces again. The primary characteristic of service labor is the performance of the work of others for others. Servicing, or domestic servitude, is the traditional form of household labor in the 19th and 20th centuries. Repetitious and invisible, service tasks are part of the realm of necessity.

With the advent of industrialization, servicing became a totally female

domain and household domestic industry, such as weaving and spinning, vanished from the home. The household as a productive unit shifted to the factory where the family produced in the employ of another. Aristocratic women were freed to employ a diminishing supply of domestic servants. Later, as children were protected by the state from exploitative working conditions, schooling became the new childhood apprenticeship and the manufacture of childhood as we know it today began.

Since "work" shifted from the household to the factory, it was not surprising that neoclassical economics ignored the household as workplace. This attitude in effect denied the existence of household labor as an economically productive sector. As a result, the housewife is widely regarded as an economic parasite. Her household tasks--maintenance service, consumption management, and child socialization--are, nevertheless, not without great impact and importance to the economy. Women have always played a major economic role. That role has remained hidden by the male definers of productivity and worth. The renewal of energies, servicing bodies and egos, and most important, the production of labor power, i.e., the creation of new workers, has been unacknowledged and, therefore, uncompensated.

The household worker has no legal right to economic compensation for domestic work, in most cases only room and board. The housewife is largely dependent on a combination of the earning power of a husband and on his disposition, and can exert little control over either.

Consumption Management. Society has delegated our second and most economically pertinent household task of the 20th century, consumption, to the largest servant labor force, the "crypto-servant class" (Galbriath, 1973). Ideology follows closely behind. "Social Virtue," the "labor of love," the "nobility" of the housewife, the "purity" of unpaid labor, has been created and maintained.

For the last 100 years, women have been esteemed for performing unpaid household labor and ridiculed for performing paid sexual services. Respect and payment are mutually exclusive. This ideological incompatibility of virtue and economics prevails. To ask for a domestic wage would seem to decrease the social value of women.

The administration and management of household consumption incorporates distribution of time to household task , budgetary allocation within the household, consumption priorities and procurement which include shopping for food, clothing, and household accessories. The higher the husband's income, it seems, the more extensive and time-consuming the tasks for the housewife to perform. The woman who must herself work outside the home is regarded as the inferior homemaker, "sacrificing her family to her selfish desire to perform real work" (Galbriath, 1973).

Since there is no limit to consumption, these attitudes emerge from a conscious, sophisticated market society that employs effective advertising and media techniques. The principal utility of the housewife class to the economy is its instrumentality in creating an unlimited increase in consumption. This function has become crucial to the increased production of consumption goods and the attendant growth in the distributive sector. From the point of view of their function under capitalism, housewives' labor in the household is functional in decreasing underconsumption and therefore aiding to counter the tendency to underconsumption which is a persistent threat to monopoly capital. It may plausibly be argued that women qua housewives are the preservers and perpetrators of capital through their role in creating unrestricted demand for the production of consumption goods, thus inhibiting the expansion of capital which is necessary to counteract underconsumption (Sweezy, 1942).

The peculiarity of analyzing the work of housewives precludes the performance

of non-market tasks by others, i.e., non-housewives. One question which arises is who performs this labor. Since, ideologically and sociologically, women are "born" housewives and men are not, there is reasonable justification for including the entire class of women--single or married, heterosexual or homosexual, employed or unemployed--within the housewife category as a universal class of sex role stereotypical members. This is not to claim that men who perform household tasks do not aid consumption activity. The purpose of analyzing the work of housewives is that this is also an analysis of the natural economy of women--of mother, wife, and daughter--within the historio-socio-economic position. On this basis, we exclude from analysis the performance of housework that is performed by men. Similarly, some forms of non-market consumption activity performed by either sex are excluded. For example, the non-market activity of driving cross-country with one's family does not apply. Nor is the purchase of a camper which may nourish the recreational needs of the family a household consumption task in this context.

Childcare. Although childcare requires an unlimited allocation of time to servicing and consumption management, socialization is the predominant task of mothers in our society. The creation and integration of childhood with housework is another social product of industrialism, the consequence of protective factory legislation in Britain promoted by the state. The development of compulsory education established childhood as a legitimate social reality. Oakley (1974) notes our deemphasis on the production of children and affirmation of serving them. Mothers are, therefore, not regarded as productive but only reproductive. The child is not a person but rather a physical entity in need of feeding, clothing and washing. Socialization, however, is productive, as the end product reveals. Socialization has been transformed into a creative discipline through the professionalization of childhood and is a predominantly female discipline.

In our society, housework is performed by females as a class, by housewives as an occupation, as mothers, as single and married women, by the employed and unemployed as a "naturally" female function. They are essentially housewives, only accidentally identified with an occupation. Their femaleness determines their domesticity.

Operational Formulation of Household Labor

This paper devotes attention to the problem of measuring nonmarket labor, specifically, valuation of household labor. Some pertinent studies will be reviewed here. There is as yet little data on the economic relationship between domestic labor and the gross national produce. Both traditional and radical economics ignore the housewive as a laborer benefiting society.

The standard unit of measurement is labor time. Consciousness raising among economists have given rise to efforts to quantify non-market labor time. But, imputed values for the housewife's labor are only partially useful in the quantification of value for the purpose of estimating worth and establishing a domestic wage. This is due to the projected unreliability of figures upon which imputation is based, as in market cost approaches, and from the fact that comparisons are made only within the market service sector.

The analysis of non-market labor time measures the allocation of time devoted to domestic labor. From the viewpoint of time-intensive consumption, a substitution of work for leisure has been shown to be involved in the activity of consumption in the household (Gamm, 1975). Time-intensive consumption as a means of analyzing non-market time applies specifically to non-employed married housewives (i.e., fulltime housewives). In Gamm's study, time spent in performing household tasks were enumerated. Time allocated to these tasks--laundry, cooking, and cleaning--was not significantly affected by the family income. Moreover, time spent on household activities is not affected by an increase in the husband's

income. The wife's time input remains unchanged or is increased by an increase in the amount of consumable commodities. While the rate of consumption is increased, the husband's time in production at his workplace is decreased. The time he spends is in inverse proportion to the time his wive spends in the management of the household.

Studies focusing on the economic importance of the American household have followed the now classic Cornell study (Walker and Gauger, 1973). Walker and Gauger surveyed nuclear families in Syracuse, New York for time spent performing household tasks by wife, husband, and children, and assigned a dollar value to hours used for household work based on local wage rates of workers who performed similar tasks. They then projected these values to a large nationwide sample. The value of housework was higher as the number of children increased. A mother of three did household work worth $8,000 while one without children did work worth $4,000. The husband's household time contribution was constant for childless men and those with children, totaling $1,200-1,300. Women who held market (paying) jobs and did housework put in a longer week than their spouses. The researchers then compared the individual family income with the entire economy and reached a distribution of household incomes in the United States. Table 1 about here. The total household income for 1968 was $212 billion. Women were responsible for nearly 75 percent or $155 billion of this figure. Unemployed housewives were responsible for $124 billion. These figures do not account for single or single-parent dwellings and are, therefore, conservative estimates. A comparison between the household income and market income was then made. It was determined that GNP would be increased by about one fourth if the household work of all family members were included.

In another time-allocation study, Vanek (1974) exposed the myth of "leisure time" by revealing that rural homemakers fifty years ago spent three hours less per week than urban homemakers spend today performing the same household tasks.

This supports the view that when time is uncompensated for, technological advancement does not correspond. If payment were made, the time required would undoubtedly be lessened since technology seeks to increase efficiency and reduce costs. In this sense, no one cares how much time a housewife spends for her labor time is not a cost. In the household, the housewife is technology. While there have been no changes in the time required to clean a house, technology has responded to increasing the consumer market which in turn increases the labor time required to transform consumables into immediate use-values. For example, advances in laundry processes reducing time input are offset by an increasing amount of time devoted to doing laundry. This is due to the production of synthetics and non-iron fabrics and to more frequent laundering. Standards of cleanliness are higher, and Vanek (1974) has shown that the working woman, with two jobs and a family, has a longer working day than her grandmother did. Where consumption production is benefited, changes have taken place. Whether these have actually benefited the woman in the home is open to dispute. It has even been calculated that more time is spent in cooking some convenience foods than in cooking them from scratch (Burns, 1975).

Another time-budget study (Hall and Schroeder, 1970) found, not surprisingly, that the work week of the housewife was determined to a large extent by the number and ages of her children. The childless household requires 35 hours, the average household requires 49 hours of housework, and the household with one to three children requires nearly 56 hours, while the household with four or more children requires 62 hours.

The most popular approach to valuing household labor is the market cost approach. This was utilized by the Social Security Administration in 1975 and is the quantitative basis of a national legislation draft co-sponsored by Bella Abzug to grant social security benefits to full-time housewives.[2] Table II about here Such legislation recognizes the financial value of non-paid work in the home

and community by allowing women to accumulate credits under the social security in their own names, as earners rather than as dependents. The "Householder's Basic Benefit" would provide payments based on the average wages for service occupations. The market cost approach multiplies the going wage rate on the market for various service workers such as cooks, taxi-drivers, laundry workers, housecleaners, by the time spent on each task. One weakness of this method is that one can arrive at widely divergent figures. In its measure of the value of household labor, the Chase Manhattan Bank concluded that 99.6 hours a week were spent by the average housewife on household tasks. At a wage rate of about $2.50 an hour, a figure of about $13,000 per year was reached. While the Chase Manhattan Bank imputed $13,000 annually, the Social Security Administration arrived at a figure of $6,417 for the average housewife, which represents the highest economic evaluation within the Social Security Administration's study--a housewife in the 25-29 age category with small children.

Another weakness has been specified by Bell (1976). The market cost method ignores the probable lowering of wages which introducing an imputed value would seem to effect on the market. We have no prior knowledge of how these prices would be affected once the same prices are used as a measure for imputing values. Its fault lies in developing and using one yardstick as its own measure. Furthermore, it is unrealistic to value the time of housewives at sums housewives themselves are unwilling to pay. This second point does not perceive the reality of why women do not pay this sum. They "prefer" to do the work themselves, not because they are unwilling to pay the sum, but because they are simply unable to pay it. Time which is uncompensated for is cheaper than paid time.

Recently, Burns (1975) charged that women are "abandoning" the household at precisely the wrong time. He claims that money is no longer an adequate measure of our economic experience, a factor simultaneous with the exodus of women from the home and into the work force. Time is the ultimate unit of

exchange. Although time may be a more adequate measure, women doubtless know that time and money are not exchangeable, even if the GNP does not reflect national economic input. Burns agrues that money no longer measures the human effort expended in productive acts and that the household economy is gradually replacing the market economy in terms of accumulating capital. Furthermore, the value of household labor amounts to nearly a third of the current gross national product. This is concluded from three major studies of unconventional work areas, that of women in the home, in the volunteer economy[3] and in the cooperative[4] economy. Burns has equated women workers in the home with other productive household assets such as storm windows, sewing machines, power tools, and yoghurt makers. With the use of these assets, homemakers produced some $155 billion in 1968. Small-scale capital goods necessitate increased labor intensity to produce commodities more cheaply than do large-scale capital goods.

Conclusion

From the labor performed, its economic and social value, once recognized may justifiabily suggest the establishment of a domestic wage. Women receive a wage under the family allowance schemes in various European countries.[5] The precedent exists for the recognition of non-wage labor as an integral economic and social contribution. The implementation of a domestic wage is a technical concern, easily dealt with once the commitment to recognition is made. In order not to recommend a wage without attempting some practical operationalization, some suggestive comments are in order.

One plan might be to allow an income deduction for household labor, thus redirecting tax revenue back into the family. This is open to the critisism, however, that we are interested in paying women for their labor, not simply giving the family additional funds. The psychology which follows from receiving a wage for their work is a feeling of worth which women performing housework should receive themselves and eventually internalize. Utilizing the government as a

distributive agent is the most feasible whichever plan of implementation is developed. This is so for the distribution of revenue deriving from any source, say even the implementation of corporate taxation and distribution to eligible households. As can be seen, the position presented here views the wage as a societal responsibility, that is, public instead of private. A private solution would be to have husbands pay wives a wage from their own salaries, but this would be problematic for various reasons, first and foremost for the reason that the work of housewives is not a private affair.

A Household Trust Fund (HTF) would be established to distribute the wage. It would receive contributions in the form of sales and income taxes obtained in accordance with the housewife's input within the three-fold valuation scheme previously mentioned. For consumption activity, there would be a tax levied on those goods in the consumer price index, or better, existing tax on these goods would be redirected to the HTF as a partial contribution. For maintenance activity, the second dimension, labor's yearly remuneration increase would be taxes at a percentage rate of the rise in labor's annual average product. Since the housewife acts as labor augmenting technical change to the breadwinner, such taxation would be deposited in the fund. Finally, for augmenting the human capital of children, the annual salaries of labor past age 21 would te taxed according to the appropriate percentage rise in present value of human capital up to 18 years.

The taxation scheme does not necessitate additional taxation, but rather more taxes redirected back into the hands of 52% of the population and, in most cases, indirectly benefiting the remaining 48% who are dependent on household labor. Distribution would be according to the labor contribution of each household regardless of the sex of the one providing domestic labor. Those without children and those who are unmarried would be eligible for a domestic wage in accordance with the proportionate amount of household labor contributed.

An alternative would be the establishment of a Household Trust Fund (HTF) deriving its revenue from a tax on employers which would be implemented in much the same fashion as the social security fund. Each employer would be required to submit the names of eligible domestic laborers so that payment will be issued to them. Unemployed women who raise children would be eligible to receive a wage along with employed wage earners. Our society already recognizes these workers by giving them a minimal subsistence payment. While they are considered parasitic because society has not defined household work as non-parasitic work, welfare mothers receive money which may be defined as a domestic wage.

The amount of the wage would be determined by the amount of the household labor contributed. Research has revealed that the number and ages of their children is one measure of the time expended in household work. A similar standard would be utilized for the computation of wage scales. Thus childless persons, married or unmarried, would receive a wage in accordance with time input on household tasks, indicated by currently acceptable research. A domestic wage scale will ultimately be based upon the number of dependents within each family.

In conclusion, from the research activity, past, present and future studies on the valuation of household labor contribute to the emergence of alternatives for the future. They have in common the necessity for a legal and social view of marriage as a predominantly economic partnership, and womankind as an economically-laden socialization process. One alternative is to encourage the role rotation according to present rigid dichotomized roles, another to have a shares role pattern, still another, which is the position taken in this paper, is to establish a wage for household laborers. One thing is clear, however, the status of the occupation would be raised through recognition of its economic value so that household laborers would have the protection and benefits of other members of the work force.

TABLE I

Household and Market-Labor Income Compared (1968 Figures)

	Billions
Total Wages and Salaries	$ 465
Total Corporate Wages	320
Total Household Wages (Men, women, children)	212
Total Women's Household Wages	155
Total Manufacturing Wages	146
Wages of Women at Home Only	124
Federal, State, and Local Government	96
Wholesale and Retail Trade	65
Services	56
Contract Construction	27
Finance, Insurance and Real Estate	22
Transportation	21
Communications and Utilities	13
Mining and Farms	8

Source: Gauger, William, Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1972, "The Potential Contribution to the GNP of Valuing Household Work"

TABLE II

Average Economic Value of Housewives and Working Women

Age Group	Average Economic Value of Women Keeping House Using the Market Cost Approach	Average Earnings of Women Employed Year Round and Full Time
15 to 19	$5,389	$4,194
20 to 24	6,061	5,884
25 to 29	6,417	7,495
30 to 34	6,416	7,423
35 to 39	5,892	7,289
40 to 44	5,908	7,341
45 to 49	5,222	7,306
50 to 54	5,222	7,387
55 to 59	3,618	7,094
60 to 64	2,942	7,052
65 to 69	2,250	
70 to 74	1,602	
75 to 79	1,090	5,456*
80 to 84	634	
85 and over	359	

*Composite figure for women aged 65 and over.

Source: Social Security Administration, 1972.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The difference between money and capital is a difference in their form of circulation. Money is not circulated to create more wealth, while capital is.

[2]H.R. 252 Abzug, amends Title II of S.S. Act to provide that services to maintain a household for employed or self-employed person(s) shall be credited for benefit purposes. Also, H.R. 12646 Jordan, Griffiths, amends Title II of the S.S. Act to provide benefits for homemakers as if they were self-employed workers. This amendment allows a homemaker who becomes ill to qualify for disability benefits.

[3]Unremunerated labor given to various organizations--charity and political party volunteer work, usually performed by women.

[4]Goods and services produced and managed by alternative groups such as fruit, vegetable, dry goods co-operatives and self sufficient, single or collective households.

[5]Some argue, cf. Huber, that they are just another way to keep women out of the economic labor market.

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